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A CASE STUDY OF ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE
AND ATTENDANCE BETWEEN REASONAL ADJUSTMENT
AND FOUNDATION YEAR STUDENTS IN LANGUAGE CLASSES

ABSTRACT
This research examines the study of students with low academic ability and mental health, namely Reasonable Adjustment (RA) students in language classes and compares it with Foundation Year (FY) students. It also considers challenges language teachers at this university may have with their students. At the university where this study was conducted, an increasing number of Reasonable Adjustment (RA) students and Foundation Year (FY) students are studying Japanese as an elective module of their degree program. RA refers to those who suffer from mental disabilities such as anxiety and depression. The aim of this study is to examine if there are any significant differences or similarities in academic performance and attendance between RA and FY students in the language studies. The study was carried out with the help of quantitative method using a final test called Unseen Exam (UEX) and students’ attendance percentage. The duration of this study was over two semesters (Autumn and Spring terms) in the 2018/19 academic year at a British university in the South of England. The participants were 16 students who learn Japanese Beginners’ level through the Institution Wide Language Program (IWLP). Among 16 students, 6 were RA students and 10 were FY students. The quantitative data were analysed using the IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences Statistical (SPSS) 25 and descriptive and analytical statistics were conducted. The results of datasets showed that there was a statistically significant difference in both UEX and attendance between FY and RAs. Also the average of FY was higher in both UEX and attendance. Furthermore, the findings of correlation showed that UEX and attendance are correlated and statistically significant. There was also a statistically significant relationship between the UEX and the students and also between the attendance and the students.

Keywords: attendance, academic performance, higher education, Foundation Year (FY) Students, language learning, Reasonable Adjustment (RA) Students.

АНОТАЦІЯ
У статті досліджено процес навчання студентів з поганими навчальними здібностями та розумовими (психологічними) проблемами, які навчаються за корекційною мовою програмою в університетах Великої Британії. Здійснено порівняльний аналіз процесу їх навчання зі студентами, які навчаються за базовою мовою програмою. Також окреслено проблеми, з якими зустрічаються викладачі таких студентів. В університеті, де проводилось дослідження, все більша кількість студентів, які навчаються за базовою або корекційною мовою програмою, вивчають японську мову як вибіркову дисципліну освітньої програми. Корекційна програма розрахована на студентів, які мають низькі розумові або психологічні проблеми і страждають на депресію та інші. Мета дослідження – засувати, чи є сутні відмінності або спільні риси в навчальних успішності та відвідуваності мовних заняття студентами, які
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навчаються за корекційною або базовою мовною програмою. У дослідженні було застосовано метод кількісного аналізу для підрахунку результатів підсумкового тесту та відсотку відвідуваності занять студентами. Дослідження тривало два семестри (осінній і весняний) у 2018–2019 н. р. у британському університеті на півдні Англії. Участь брали 16 студентів, які навчають японську на початковому рівні в рамках мовної програми Institution Wide Language Program. Серед 16 студентів 10 навчалися за базовою програмою і 6 – за корекційною. Було проаналізовано кількісні дані, а також зібрано описову та аналітичну статистику. Результати даних свідчать про значну статистичну відмінність між студентами, які навчаються за базовою або корекційною програмою як за результатами тесту, так і за відсотком відвідуваності мовних занять. Середній показник студентів, які займаються за базовою програмою, є вищим за двома показниками. Дослідження показала статистично важливе співвідношення між результатами тесту, відсотком відвідуваності занять та самими студентами.

Ключові слова: відвідуваність, навчальна успішність, вища освіта, базова програма навчання іноземної мови, вивчення мови, корекційна програма навчання іноземної мови.

INTRODUCTION

Globalisation brings the university classrooms a diversity of learners in various cultural backgrounds, academic abilities, physical and mental health. This study examines the students with low academic ability and mental health. The language teachers at this university may have two challenges with their students. The first challenge is the fact that this university welcomes and encourages mental health students as follows in the university website, namely: “This university offers a free counselling services and confidential therapy to students, offering a range of therapeutic approaches for individuals and group counselling, as well as workshops. Counselling sessions are 50 minutes long. In addition to counselling service, Student Support Unit (SSU) offers specialist advice and guidance to any student with a physical disability, mental health disability and dyslexia or dyspraxia. All students with a disability or long-term health condition who register with the SSU will be allocated a Disability Advisor.”

Mental health students at this university are told to call “Reasonable Adjustments (RAs)” among the language staff because they require reasonable adjustments in the assessment. RAs in assessment include: 1) 25 % extra time is given; 2) sitting in the exam in small group and 3) 15-minute rest break. RAs during the classroom include: 1) leaving the seminar/lecture and one-to-one presentation with the lecturer instead of presentation in the classroom; 2) even though students are absent from the class, lecturers have to make his/her attendance to Absent Notified; 3) do not ask the student academic questions in front of the class; 4) coursework extension for the deadline (7 days) can be requested.

As RAs include various psychological illnesses, specifically students with depression, anxiety and learning disability. RAs also include aspects of learning disability, which are characterised by significant limitations in intellectual function, reasoning, learning, problem solving and in adaptive behaviour’ (Adibsershki et al., 2015).

The second challenge is that this university has FY programs. FY programmes offer “unqualified people to upgrade their knowledge sufficiently to qualify them to enter tertiary programmes” (Fraser et al., 1990). The majorities of the foundation courses seem to agree that foundation year study provides the preparation for the undergraduate studies. The focus of current FY programs at British universities seems to include at least the following two: a) to “gain the subject-specific knowledge and skills required to move onto degree-level studies” (University A) and b) “practice-based with opportunities to develop academic skills and abilities” (University B). Although the university in this study does not clearly
indicate the focus of its FY program, considering that FY students in this study are allowed to take language courses as one of their learning options, the focus of FY may be considered as “practice-based”.

THE AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study is to explore the relationship between students’ Unseen Exam (UEX) test results and their attendance in the Japanese classes. Japanese is offered as a part of their degree through Institution Wide Language Programme (IWLP). Previous studies find that attendance has positive effect on students’ grades. Considering “the vicious cycle between poor attendance and poor performances” (Kwak, Sherwood & Tang, 2018), the results of this study may be anticipated. This paper was guided by the following Research Question (RQ):

Is there any significant difference in academic performance and attendance participation between RAs and FY students?

This RQ has two specific sub-questions:
- Does the average UEX marks differ between RAs and FY students?
- Does the average attendance differ between RAs and FY students?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODS

Various factors may be associated with the cause of RAs. Psychological research indicates that children of highly dysfunctional families are at risk for mental health problem (Lipman, Offord & Boyle, 1994). Family dysfunction is defined as “the attendance of mutually supportive, trusting and respectful family relationships” (Strohschein, 2005). For example, individuals lacking the necessary encouragement at home may not be predisposed to participation and sense of belonging (Finn, 1989). Parental attachment among college freshmen has also been linked to lower level of psychological distress (Bradford & Lyddon, 1993) and better psychological adjustment (Holmbeck & Wandrei, 1993; Kenny & Donaldon, 1991). Whether the student is the “first- or second- generation college student” is also an important factor. According to Pittman & Richmond (2007), first-generation college students are those who entered university without guidance of parents who have already completed a university education. The first-generation college students appear to have more problems adapting to the university environment than second-generation college students (Shields, 2002), such as difficulty of self-regulating the learning process, meeting deadlines and concentrating on subject (Hellman & Harbeck, 1997). Remarriage may have negative effects on children (Chase-Lansdale, 1994; Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1994; Heatherington & Clingempeel, 1992; Kerman, 1992). Several large-scale surveys with nationally representative samples find modest long-term negative effects of divorce in childhood or adolescence (Amato & Booth, 1991; Furstenberg & Teiler, 1994; Kessler & Magee, 1994). The study of parental divorce and child mental health trajectories indicates that in comparison to children in intact households, children whose parents divorce over the course of the survey exhibit slightly higher levels of anxiety/depression prior to divorce and there is a further increase in anxiety/depression in response to the divorce itself (Strohschein, 2005). The ability and motivation of one or both parents to invest time, effort and resources into the lives of their children may become increasingly compromised (Sun & Li, 2001) and “failure to make these investments overtime...exacts a mental health cost on children” (Stohschein, 2005).

The following research methods have been used:

1. Sample

The total number of students is 16, of which 10 students are FY and RA is 6 students. Among 6 RAs students who registered with SSU, four students suffer from both...
anxiety and depression, one suffers from dyslexia, one student suffers from autism and OCD and one student suffers from the combination of depressions, anxiety and OCD. This study also includes some FY students who show the similar attendance and exam marks but they prefer not to disclose their RA status. Students attend the classes twice a week for 12 weeks per term. The duration of this study was two terms (Autumn and Spring terms).

2. Data collection and reliability

Two sets of quantitative data are: 1) results of students’ UEX score and 2) their attendance in percentage. Attendance data were recorded and collected for the two semesters a year. UEX is one of five assessments in Autumn and Spring term: Autumn term has two Assignments (each value 50 %) and spring term has two Assignments (each value 25 %) and the UEX (50 %). The reason why UEX was chosen is because this is the only assessment which was timed (90 minutes) and administered by invigilators. In addition, a previous study (Winch, 2013) suggests that the assessment which is timed and administered by invigilators is more statistically significant than the coursework which students can submit on line or take home and submit them. The Unseen exam consists of three parts: Grammar, Reading and Writing. Grammar and Reading consists of a mixture of closed and open-ended questions. Reliability is defined as “consistency with which we measure something”. Considering the reliability of the UEX, it is possible to say that marking and grading can be considered fairly reliable, as it was consistently marked and graded for the two groups by one teacher (who was also the researcher). UEX was also double-checked by another teaching staff for quality check which increases the reliability.

3. Data analysis

IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Statistics 25 was used for the descriptive statistics and statistical analyses. “Descriptive statistics include the mean, standard deviation (SD), range of scores, skewness and kurtosis”. Statistical analyses include t-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), correlation. Correlation is used to explore the association or relationship between pairs of variables and for non-experimental research designs. ANOVA is used to explore differences among three- (or more) groups (Pallent, 2013), the Chi-square test evaluates changes in a single-group (Robson, 2011) and a t-test is a test for two-groups or two sets of data (before or after). To address RQ2, descriptive statistics, t-test and correlation were considered suitable to be used. Correlation was considered suitable to examine if UEX and attendance are statistically correlated. As for t-tests, there are several different types of t-tests available such as paired-sample t-tests and independent sample t-tests. Paired-samples t-tests compare scores on two different variables but for the same group of cases whereas independent-samples t-tests compare scores on the same variable but for two different groups of cases. In this study, independent-sample t-test is also used as it addresses the two sub-RQs of the RQ2. Independent-sample t-test is “used when you want to compare the mean scores of two different groups of people or conditions” (Pallant, 2013). In this study, 16 students were split into two groups, that is, RAs as one group and FY as a second group. The aim was to see if the means of FY are statistically significantly different than the means for RAs in UEX and attendance. Two groups are measured one time. As each of the group is independent of each other, we can use an independent sample t-test. Two groups (RAs and FY) are measured in variables of UEX scores and attendance percentage. Two sub-questions to the RQ2 were given: if there are any significant differences in UEX scores between RAs and FY students (sub question 1 to the RQ2) and if the average attendance differs between RAs and FY students (sub question 2 to the RQ2). So, two variables of UEX scores and absence percentage are compared between RAs and FY students.
RESULTS

Descriptive statistics of UEX scores for FY and RAs

The mean (std deviation) score for all students (sixteen) was 34.56 (27.06), scores ranged from 0 to 82. Comparing the means and standard deviation for FY and RA student for UEX scores, the breakdown of eleven students were seven FY students and four RA students. The mean (Std Deviation) score for FY was 46.90 (27.74) whereas the mean (Std Deviation) score for RAs was 14.00 (16.82).

These descriptive statistics indicate two different academic ability groups which can be summarised using Stem-and-leaf plots. It shows that the means of FY students are higher (46.9 \%) than those of RA students (14 \%).

Descriptive statistics of attendance for FY and RAs

We will now focus on a different variable – attendance. The mean (std deviation) score for all students (sixteen students) was 69.63 (25.97), scores ranged from 8 to 100. Comparing the means and standard deviation for FY and RA student for attendance, the breakdown of sixteen students were ten FY students and six RA students. The mean (Std Deviation) score for FY was 81.20 (16.67) whereas the mean (std deviation) score for RAs was 49.67 (27.70).

The above stem-leaf-plots indicate that distributions for FY and RA students are also different. The means of FY students are higher (81.2 \%) than those of RA students (49.7 \%). Since this study was conducted over two semesters, next section considers each semester (Autumn and Spring term).
Analysis of Independent sample t-test

There are three ways to determine statistical significance. The first is to compare the t-value to a critical value for the t distribution. For 14 degrees of freedom, the critical value is 2.145. This will be the same critical value for both of these t-tests (i.e. UEX and attendance). For UEX score, t-value is 2.865, which is larger than the critical value of 2.145. When the t-value is larger than the critical value, the means are statistically significantly different. The t-value for attendance is 2.871, which is also larger than the critical value of 2.145. Therefore, by this determinant of significance the attendance means are statistically significant.

Secondly, the probability values are smaller than 0.05. The p-value for UEX is 0.01 which is smaller. The p-value for attendance is also 0.01 which is smaller than 0.05. Thirdly, we look at confident interval if it crosses zero. For UEX, both lower and upper value are positive (do not cross zero). For attendance, both lower and upper values are also positive (do not cross zero).

The UEX mean score of FY students is 46.90 and that of RA is 14.00. Therefore, the performance of FY students in UEX score was significantly better than that of RAs. The Attendance mean score of FY students is 81.20% and that of RA is 49.67%. Therefore, the FY students’ attendance to the class was significantly better than that of RAs. We should also note about the effect size.

Correlation between UEX and Attendance

We can see correlation coefficient between two variables of UEX score and attendance. Correlation coefficient between UEX and attendance is 0.660, which is pretty high. As the significant level is 0.005, it is smaller than 0.05. UEX and Attendance are correlated and statistically significant. The biserial correlation between UEX and students (-0.608*) has an asterisk. This means that we can see that this correlation is significant at the 0.005 level. In fact, the p-value is 0.012. Therefore, there is a statistically significant relationship between the UEX and students. Similarly, the biserial correlation between

Figure 2. Stem-and-leaf plots for Attendance percent to compare FY and RA students
attendance and students (−0.609*) has an asterisk. This means that we can see that this correlation is significant at the 0.005 level. In fact, the p-value is 0.012. So there is a statistically significant relationship between the attendance and student.

CONCLUSIONS

A review of the RQ enabled us to summarise key conclusions of this study. RQ was if there is any significant difference in academic performance and attendance participation between RAs and FY students. The results of the descriptive statistics and statistical analysis of the datasets showed that there was statistically significantly difference in both UEX and attendance between FY and RAs. They also showed that the means of FY were both higher in UEX and attendance.

In the result of the study we managed to answer two sub-questions:

1. Does the average UEX marks differ between RAs and FY students? The answer is: as for UEX scores, the FY students (Mean = 46.90, SD = 24.74; t [16] = 2.865, p = 0.012) had statistically significantly better marks than RA (Mean = 14.00, SD = 16.82). The mean score of UEX for the FY was 32.9 points higher than that of RAs.

2. Does the average attendance differ between RAs and FY students? The answer is: attendance of FY students is M = 81.20, SD = 16.67 and of RAs it is M = 49.67, SD = 27.70; t (16) = 2.87, p = 0.012. The mean score of attendance for the FY was 30.87 percent higher than that of RAs, which indicates that FY’s attendance is much better than that of RA.

To discuss suggestions of further research, the limitation of this study should be acknowledged. The limitation of this study was to consider FYs and RAs as nominal values, which means considering FYs and RAs as completely independent each other. However, the reality of the students cannot be clearly separated FYs and RAs, as some RAs may be also FYs whereas some RAs may be undergraduate first-year students. Therefore, suggested further studies include addressing this point, that is, separating RAs into two groups (Group 1: FY RAs; Group2: first-year RAs), and comparing the means of UEX and attendance between these two groups for further investigation.

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